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## SOME ASPECTS OF FOLK-SONG

BY PHILLIPS BARRY, A.M.

FOLK-SONG is a treasure-house of the events of human experience in all possible phases, of all the lights and shadows of human fancy, and, furthermore, of all that by common consent of the folk is beautiful. One needs not to be an artist, but only human, to delight in it, to feel the irresistible charm of its melodies, in each of them the years' long labor, not of one, but of a multitude on whom the Muse has smiled, and to be thrilled by the dramatic force of its expression, to be carried away from self, to live in the thoughts and actions of its heroes and heroines.

The songs in the present article are selected in part by reason of their æsthetic worth, in part for their significance as illustrating the manner and process of growth of folk-song.

I. THE HOUSE-CARPENTER<sup>1</sup>*Dorian.*

1. "Well-met, well-met, my own true love,  
Well-met, well-met," says he,  
"I've just returned from the salt water sea,  
And it's all for the love of thee!"
2. "I might have married a king's daughter fair,  
In vain she'd have married me,  
But I refused the crown of gold,  
And it's all for the love of thee!"
3. "If you could have married a king's daughter fair,  
I think you are much to blame,  
For I have married a house-carpenter,  
And I think he's a nice young man."
4. "If you will forsake your house-carpenter,  
And will run away with me,  
I'll take you where the grass grows green,  
On the banks of Italy!"

<sup>1</sup> "The Demon Lover," B, *Folk-Songs of the North Atlantic States*. From O. F. A. C., Harrisburg, Pa.

5. "If I forsake my house-carpenter,  
    And will run away with thee,  
What have you for to maintain me upon,  
    And keep me from slavery?"
6. "I have four and twenty ships at sea,  
    All making for dry land,  
I've a hundred and forty jolly sailor boys,  
    They shall all come at your command."
7. She pressed her babe up to her lips,  
    And gave it kisses three,  
Saying, "Stay here, stay, my sweet little babe,  
    And keep your papa's company!"
8. She dressed herself in rich array,  
    Most glorious to behold,  
And as she walked the streets along,  
    She shone like glittering gold.
9. They had not sailed but about two weeks,  
    I'm sure it was not three,  
Until this lady began to weep,  
    And she wept most bitterly.
10. "Are you weeping for my gold?" said he,  
    "Or is it for my store?  
Or are you weeping for that house-carpenter  
    Which you never shall see any more?"
11. "I'm not weeping for your gold," said she,  
    "Nor is it for your store,  
But I'm weeping for my sweet little babe,  
    Which I never shall see any more."
12. They had not sailed but about three weeks,  
    I'm sure it was not four,  
Until this good old ship sprang a leak,  
    And she sunk for to rise no more.
13. "Adieu, adieu, my jolly sailor boys!  
    Adieu, adieu!" he cried,  
"For I have robbed a house-carpenter,  
    By the stealing away of his bride."

The *ballad of situation*, to which type "The House-Carpenter" belongs, impresses us by the realism of the action. Another species, the *ballad of introspection*, as it may be called, in which the interest centres around the chief actor as a personality, is well represented by the following item.

2. THE MINISTER'S LAMENTATION<sup>1</sup>

1. "One day, while in a lonely grove,  
Sat o'er my head a little dove,  
For her lost mate she began to coo,  
Which made me think of my mate too.
2. "O little dove, you're not alone,  
Like you I am constrained to mourn,  
For once, like you, I had a mate,  
But now, like you, must mourn my fate.
3. "Consumption seized her lungs severe,  
And preyed upon them one long year,  
Then death did come at the close of day,  
And he did my poor Mary slay.
4. "But death, grim death, did not stop here, —  
I had a babe to me most dear, —  
He like a vulture came again,  
And took from me my little Jane.
5. "But, bless the Lord, the word is given,  
That babes are born the heirs of heaven!  
Then cease, my heart, to mourn for Jane,<sup>2</sup>  
Since my small loss is her great gain."

Another form of the ballad of introspection is the homiletic ballad. Of this type is "The Unfortunate Rake," current in Ireland as early as 1790, and not yet extinct in England. In its original form, it is the lament of a dissolute soldier, dying in the hospital, who regrets his life of vice, and asks for military honors.

"Muffle your drums, play your pipes merrily,  
Play the dead march as you go along,  
And fire your guns right over my coffin,  
There goes an unfortunate lad to his home."

Preaching is foreign to the mood of folk-song. "The Unfortunate Rake" has survived as a result of textual and thematic recreation. Out of it have grown two ballads, entirely distinct in subject, as comparison of the following items will show.

<sup>1</sup> "The Minister's Lamentation," A, *Folk-Songs of the North Atlantic States*. From O. F. A. C., Harrisburg, Pa.

<sup>2</sup> Y. Glomen, "The Dove," a Welsh ballad, in its opening stanza, is almost identical with the opening stanza of "The Minister's Lamentation," *Journal of the Welsh Folk-Song Society*, vol. i, part ii, p. 70.



That "The Unfortunate Rake" is the original of both ballads, is evident from the retention of the request for a military funeral, equally absurd for maiden or cowboy.

An instance of a new ballad made through continued communal re-creation on the part of folk-singers is the well-known cowboy song, "The Lone Prairie." The following version is, by its very brevity and suggestiveness, particularly effective.

#### 5. THE LONE PRAIRIE<sup>1</sup>

1. Oh, a trapper lay at the point of death,  
And, short his bank account, short his breath,  
And as he lay, this prayer breathed he,  
"Oh, bury me not on the lone prairie!"
2. "Oh, bury me not on the lone prairie,  
Where the wild coyote can howl o'er me,  
Where the rattlesnakes hiss and the winds blow free,  
Oh, bury me not on the lone prairie!"
3. But they heeded not his dying prayer,  
On the lone prairie, they buried him there,  
Where the rattlesnakes sing, and the wind blows free,  
They buried him there on the lone prairie!

This piece has many of the characteristics of the ballad of situation. Its prototype, widely current in the Eastern States, is much more of the type of the ballad of introspection.

#### 6. THE OCEAN-BURIAL<sup>2</sup>

1. "Oh, bury me not in the deep, deep sea!"  
These words came faint and mournfully  
From the pallid lips of a youth who lay  
On his cabin couch, where day by day,

<sup>1</sup> Professor H. M. Belden, to whom I am indebted for this version, writes of it, "I first heard this from an engineer, who had learned it in the Kansas oil-fields."

<sup>2</sup> "The Ocean Burial," C, *Folk-Songs of the North Atlantic States*. From O. F. A. C., Harrisburg, Pa. A text of this ballad, which may be the archetype, ascribed to Capt. W. H. Saunders, is in *Choice Readings* (ed. R. I. Fulton and T. C. Trueblood), p. 169. Another tradition ascribes the authorship to Rev. E. N. Chapin.

He had wasted and pined, until o'er his brow,  
The death sweats had slowly passed, and now,  
The scenes of his fondly loved home was nigh,  
And they gathered around him to see him die.

2. "Oh, bury me not in the deep, deep sea,  
Where the billow's shroud shall roll o'er me,  
Where no light can break through the dark, cold wave,  
Or the sun shine sweetly upon my grave!  
Oh, it matters not, I have oft been told,  
Where the body is laid, when the heart grows cold,  
But grant ye, oh, grant ye this boon to me,  
Oh, bury me not in the deep, deep sea!"
3. "In fancy I've listened to the well known words,  
Of the free wild winds and songs of birds,  
I've thought of my home, my cot and bower,  
And the scenes which I loved in my childhood's hour,  
Where I've ever hoped to be laid when I died,  
In the old churchyard by the green hillside,  
Near the home of my father, my grave should be,  
Oh, bury me not in the deep, deep sea!"
4. "Let my death slumbers be where a mother's prayer  
And a sister's tears can be blended there,  
For, oh, 't will be sweet, when this heart throb is o'er,  
To know, this fountain shall gush no more,  
For those who I've earnestly wished for would come,  
And plant fresh wild flowers o'er my tomb,  
If pleased those loved ones should weep for me,  
Oh, bury me not in the deep, deep sea!"
5. "And there is another, whose tears might be shed,  
For him who lies low in the ocean's bed.  
In hours that it pains me to think on now,  
She has twined these locks, she has kissed this brow.  
The hair she has wreathed will the sea snake hiss,  
The heart she has pressed, will wild waves kiss,  
For the sake of that loved one who waits for me,  
Oh, bury me not in the deep, deep sea!"
6. "She has been in my dreams" . . . And his voice failed there.  
And they gave no heed to his dying prayer.  
But they lowered him slow o'er the vessel's side,  
And above him closed the solemn tide.  
Where to dip her wings, the sea fowl rests,  
Where the blue waves dash with their foaming crests.  
Where the billows do bound, and the wind sports free,  
They buried him there in the deep, deep sea!"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The text of "The Lone Prairie," from MS. of G. W., loaned by Professor Belden, has in the refrain, in place of the first four lines of stanza 2, above, —

"O bury me not on the lone prairie,  
Where the wild coyote will howl o'er me,  
Where the cold winds sweep and the grasses wave,  
No sunbeams rest on a prairie grave."

A word in passing may not be amiss, concerning the part of the folk-singer in the re-creation of melodies. It is well known that folk-melodies are of simple structure, for the most part, with a constant tendency toward greater simplicity. The accompanying melody to another version of "The Ocean Burial" will, upon comparison with the form of the air from which it has been derived, illustrate this fact.

THE OCEAN-BURIAL<sup>1</sup>

The history of the well-known parlor song, "Come back to Erin," now well established as an Irish folk-song, affords further evidence. The original air, of complicated structure, and quite artificial in manner, has been re-created as a folk-melody, many characteristic sets of which doubtless exist. Two may here be printed, showing the manner in which changes for improvement, due to folk-singing, arise.

## 7. COME BACK TO ERIN

I<sup>2</sup>II<sup>3</sup>

In place of the last four lines on p. 279, the same version of "The Lone Prairie" has, in stanza 5, —

"May the light winged butterfly pause to rest,  
O'er him who sleeps on the prairie's crest,  
May the Texas rose in the breezes wave,  
O'er him who sleeps in a prairie grave."

The poetic beauty of this thought could hardly be exceeded.

<sup>1</sup> "The Ocean Burial," A, *Folk-Songs of the North Atlantic States*. From W. L. S., Boston, Mass.

<sup>2</sup> "Come back to Erin," B, *Folk-Songs of the North Atlantic States*. From E. J. C., Boston, Mass.

<sup>3</sup> "Come back to Erin," D, *Folk-Songs of the North Atlantic States*. From A. C., Antigonish, N. S., as sung by an Irish girl in Boston, Mass.

The fact that folk-song deals with the lights as well as with the shadows of human experience and fancy, makes room for an element of the humorous as well as of the serious. Not to speak of extravaganzas of imagination, such as "The Derby Ram," or "The Wonderful Hunter," many folk-songs exist whose merit is in their faculty of raising a laugh. In particular, mention may be made of the large class of songs at the expense of the aged spark and his flirtations. Some forms of this theme verge on the coarse; innocent humor alone is in the following song.

8. THE BACHELOR'S COMPLAINT<sup>1</sup>

1. Once I heard an old bachelor say  
When his hair was turning gray,  
"I wonder what the matter can be  
That all the pretty girls so dislike me!"
2. "I've tried the rich and I've tried the poor,  
And many a time I've been kicked out of door,  
I've tried silver, and I've tried gold,  
And many a lie in my life I have told.
3. "Three good horses I rode them to death,  
I rode them as long as they had breath,  
Three good saddles rode bare to the tree,  
Trying to find the girl that would marry me."<sup>2</sup>
4. He wept and he mourned and he wailed and he cried,  
And in this condition, this bachelor died.  
And if he lies here, I fear he'll come to life,  
And still be a-trying to get him a wife.
5. Come, all ye pretty fair maids, come gather around,  
And put this old bachelor under the ground,  
For if he lies here, I fear he'll come to life,  
And still be a trying to get him a wife.

<sup>1</sup> "The Bachelor's Complaint," B, *Folk-Songs of the North Atlantic States*. From H. L. W., Cambridge, Mass.

<sup>2</sup> The following lines from "The Bachelor's Complaint," A (from J. C., Vineland, N. J.), are worthy of record here.

4. He rode nine horses all to death,  
He rode them till they was out of breath,  
He rode his saddle bare to the tree,  
And not one pretty girl would marry he!
5. "Now, girls, I'm a dying man,  
Don't you wish they'd married me,  
Darn the girls, wherever they be,  
I hope they'll die for the love of me!"

In closing, it may be said that the music of folk-song constitutes one of its greatest charms. Not only have many ballads been kept alive by the rare beauty of their melodies; but it is not too much to affirm that certain of the best ballads (as, for instance, "Chevy-Chase") which have perished, failed to survive because they were set to melodies which were neither pleasing nor characteristic. For their beauty's sake, the following melodies are put in evidence.

## 9. MELODIES

(a) *Remember the Poor*<sup>1</sup>(b) *Barbara Allen*<sup>2</sup>(c) *Silver Dagger*<sup>3</sup>(d) *The Dawning of the Day*<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Melody from A. M. B., Providence, R. I.

<sup>2</sup> "Barbara Allen," G, *Folk-Songs of the North Atlantic States*. From A. C., Antigonish, N. S.

<sup>3</sup> "The Silver Dagger," A, *Folk-Songs of the North Atlantic States*. From H. L. W., Cambridge, Mass.

<sup>4</sup> MS. of Henry Hudson, M.D. (Allen A. Brown Collection, Boston Public Library, No. M. 374a, 7. Melody 449, from Paddy Conneely, a Galway piper.) According to Irish tradition, this air, of which a number of sets exist, was originally the composition of O'Connallan, the noted Irish harper.



Of these melodies, the first three are structurally typical of the English, Scottish, and Irish types of folk-music. The fourth, a particularly fine example of an Irish air, is further noteworthy from the fact that it is partially cast in the Lydian mode,



survivals of which in folk-music at the present day are extremely rare.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Fair Phoebe," *Journal of the Folk-Song Society*, vol. iv, p. 131, is a Lydian air. The Irish air "Eoghan Coir" exists in three sets, — one of them Lydian, one Mixolydian, and one Ionian, — showing the development from the archaic to the modern mode.